

INTERVIEW

Interview: *Peter Campus*

Interview by Jean Wainwright

Albion Gallery, London, presented an exhibition of early works by the pioneering New York video artist Peter Campus, organized by former Whitney Museum director David A. Ross, in March 2008. The exhibition marked Campus's first major solo show in the UK, and included five of the artist's groundbreaking and rarely shown closed-circuit video installations, "kiva", 1971, "optical sockets", 1975, "amanesis", 1975, "stasis", 1975, and "col", 1974. Several recorded works made throughout the length Campus's career were also on view.

Jean Wainwright: This is the first exhibition you have had in this country and the first time you have shown your black and white closed-circuit pieces since you made them in the early seventies.

Peter Campus: I have always been extremely reluctant to recreate those works and haven't for thirty-five years. The earliest piece in the show is *Kiva* (1971). All four of the seventies pieces are electromechanical outside views of us. When I started making these works there were some surveillance cameras, but not many, and I was interested in the detached outside view of what we are doing, where are we standing. These works are also an accumulation of everything that has gone on in the room during the life of the piece even though it is not recorded.

JW. Were you attracted to the instant feedback of video; the material of the medium?

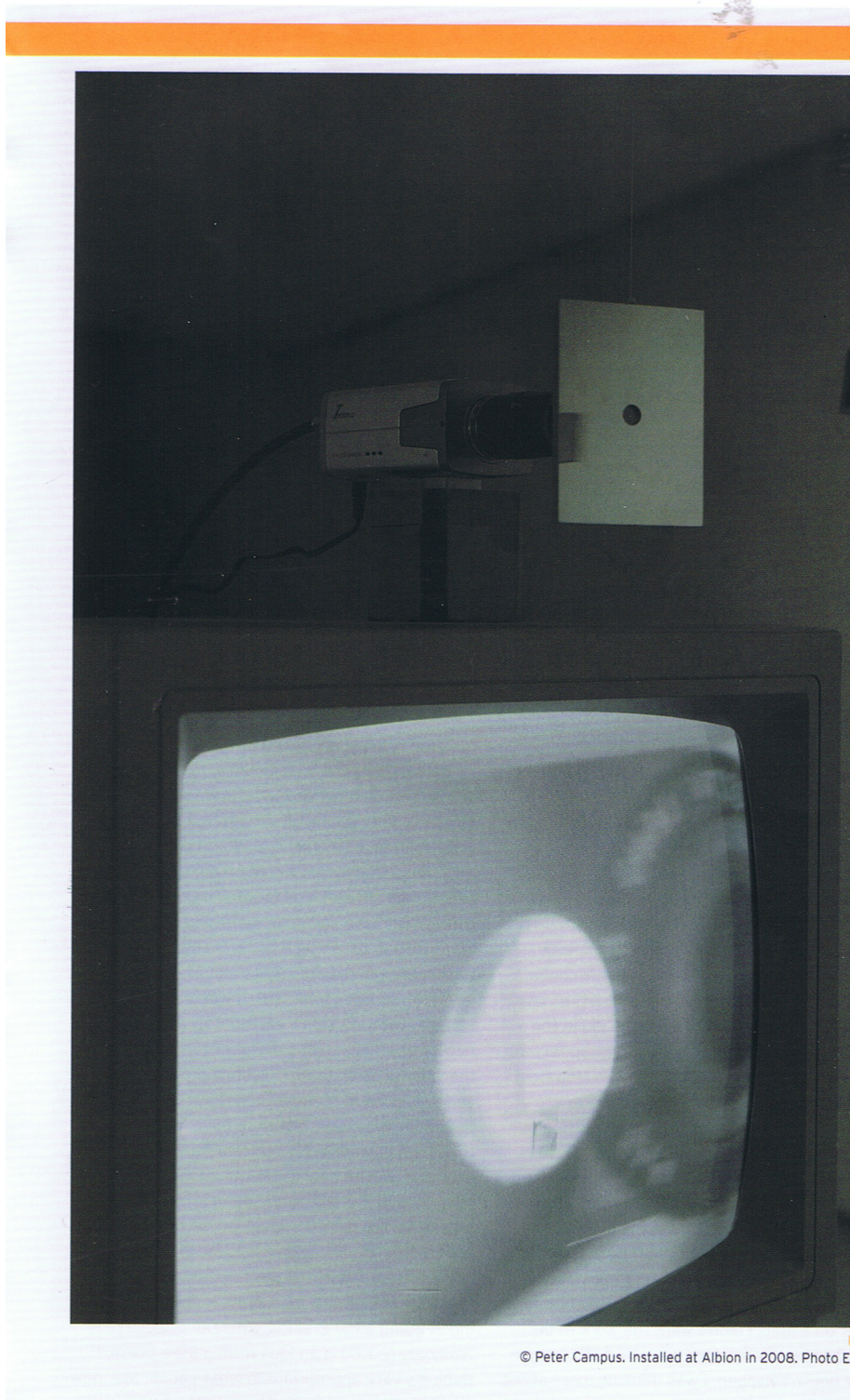
PC. Film and video have a different psychology to them. With the work from the seventies it was also the notion of time - you experience these pieces in their own time. *Amanesis* (1974) is about time delay and duration which I experimented with. It all occurs through the same camera but it's about

the discovery of your relationship to the piece. I also decided to stay with black and white which deals with the issue of separation and removal. With *Stasis* (1974) as with almost all of these pieces, there is not one particular spot to stand in; being in the shadows is just as important as being too large or being too small. I spent a lot of time trying to make things look simple but they remain unbelievably complex. Capturing all the various points where you could be in it has to be really precise. *Optical Sockets* (1974) is also about being surveyed but from four different directions with an accumulation of an outside image of yourself.

JW. Your work also relates to the link between film and painting, with a very cubist vision.

PC. Oh definitely, I was referring to certain scientific principals. There are many possible observations to be made, whether they be relativity or quantum mechanics. Also, there is no perfect viewing place, but there are many scenarios that can be played out. Video came out of quantum theory and that has always interested me. We begin to see art and science moving closer together. In the late sixties one of the things we discovered with video was how boring it was. We would turn on the camera and think that just because we were sitting in front of it, it would be really interesting. Of course we were doing some mind-bending things at the same time. I think this is what interested me with the closed-circuit medium. Recordings weren't so interesting but doing something in front of the camera was. People were tired of the totally commercial art world and thought that they would overthrow it. We thought video was art for the masses, which of course it wasn't. We had great ideals and wanted a much more public art that didn't have to be cycled through commercial art spaces. In 1969 I had bought a reel-to-reel video camera and everyone

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Stasis, 1973
© Peter Campus. Installed at Albion in 2008, closed circuit video installation. Photo Ed Reeves

around me started using it. People like Bob Smithson, Nancy Hall, and Joan Jonas.

JW. The current series is very different. Why have you structured it in this way?

PC. The smaller scale of the current work has a different intent. You have to remember that I entered the art world during minimalism, with the notion of surrounding the viewer with huge paintings. As I got older I wanted to ask the viewer to do something very much the way I did in the interactive pieces of the seventies; to step forward and be engaged rather than having me step right up to them and engage them. These works are a little chunk of the landscape that I am cutting out and framing. I chose Ponquogue Bay because I live near there. It has an inlet from the ocean and the light, the birds, the traffic is amazing. I also feel that it is being eroded by our presence. A lot of the themes of these six works are trying to deal with us taking away from nature instead of respecting it. The duration is six minutes fifteen seconds on a loop. I didn't want the work to be determined by the moment when something happens or doesn't happen. I was thinking more about stasis and duration and also when Faulkner talks about time.

JW. They have a painterly aesthetic. Where does that stem from?

PC. I am heavily influenced by landscape painting - from van Ruisdael to Constable, to Turner and Monet. I studied physiological psychology and a lot of my work is concerned with the functioning and evolution of the senses. What I am presenting with these landscapes would be an impossible experiment for my mind because I would have to constantly move my head, gathering and accumulating all this data which the brain has a tendency to simplify whereas the video camera doesn't. I am using my knowledge of film - I worked in the film industry for ten years - and photography in these new pieces. I kept using different techniques and then finally came to this. It probably took three years working in the same bay. I use the high definition Panasonic, which to me is very similar to setting up a large format camera. Each frame is shot at a 1000th of a second so it records things very crisply. The surround-sound is also important. I wanted a sense that you are somewhere specific, but there is all this noise pollution. With *Land of Counterpane* (2007) the title is from Robert Louis Stevenson and its subject is about dreaming of going away in ships, whereas *The earth is Nowhere* (2007) is an idea from a Rilke poem. I think it's very appropriate to what people fear now - and I love these words. The best thing about art is making art and the thing that has stayed with me that has kept me alive is sitting there doing it, sitting there making it.